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Europe
Bulgaria

Momchiloff

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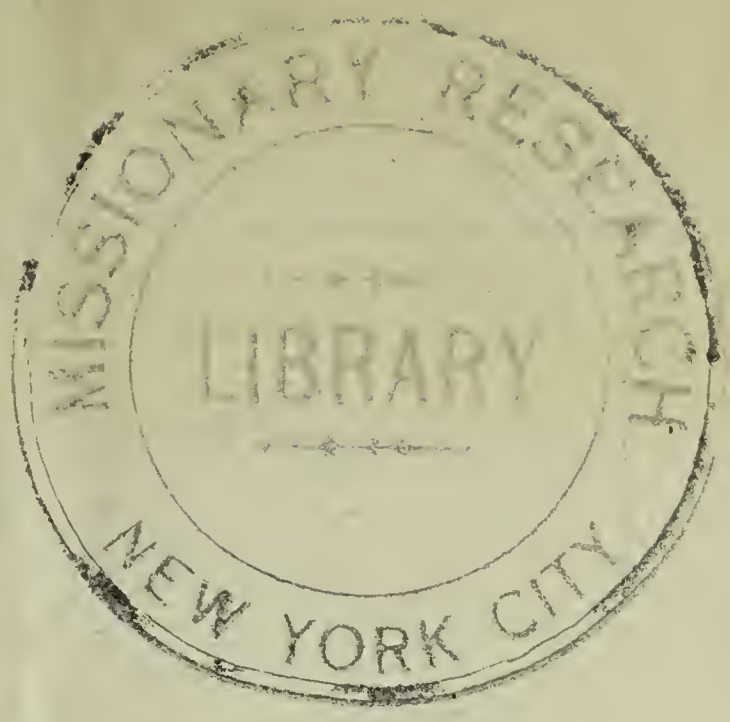

BULGARIA

AND

THE GOSPEL PRINTING PRESS.

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
AUBURN, N. Y.

From A.B.C.F. Levant File.

MAP OF BULGARIA

AND ADJOINING COUNTRIES.

THE MARKED INCIDENTS OF MY LIFE.

Out of the Turks' Hands.

The Bulgarian massacres were committed eighteen years ago. The massacres and the war, known as the Russo-Turkish war (1877–8) resulted in the creation of a New and Free Bulgaria.

My home was in the midst of battle and carnage. The thunders of canon in the distance, the smoke of the burnings villages and towns, which we could see on all sides, and rumors of bloodshed, had excited the people to the highest pitch. We could trace the approach of the Turks by the smoke of the burning villages afar off, and by the people who had escaped and were fleeing to the city. On one morning 85,000 Turks armed to the teeth reached our city. After six or eight hours of resistance in an unequal battle, the Turks took the city and commenced the massacre. They rushed upon us from all sides, demolishing, butchering and burning. We were in a basement room stored with furniture, when the Turks burst open the door. In a moment we concealed ourselves under the furniture. I dropped in between two flour barrels; my father to my right with a washtub over him, and my uncle with his child in his arms not more than five feet in front of us under a piece of furniture; I did not notice where the rest of the family were hidden. While the Turks were breaking in the door, the child in uncle's arms became frightened and was crying when they came in. The father and the child were discovered. He began to plead for his life, but the Turks cried out, "The knife," and killed them both without hesitation. The child's last cry, after it was struck with the knife, was for her father.

By the time night began to fall the entire city was on fire. It was death to stay in the house, and death to come out. The Turks were on the streets shooting any man, woman, or child who should appear. Those who feared the Turks more than the fire, stayed in and were burned alive. When our house caught fire, father and I attempted to cross to the other side of the street for less danger from the fire. As soon as we appeared on the street, the Turks saw us and started

toward us. Father told me to run across and hide, and I obeyed. But he stayed back. About three minutes afterwards I came slowly out to watch for him. I saw he had fallen about the middle of the street,—killed.

I was left alone. Soon the fires were burning on all sides of me, and when the evening grew still darker, I went out on the street, let happen what might, for I had given up all hope of being left alive. Some of the streets which I passed through, were literally covered with the dead bodies of men and women, and even children. I was caught by three different Turks that night, and how I escaped death is still a mystery to me. I succeeded in getting away alive from the first Turk I approached, but only to fall in the hands of a crowd of them, for it was impossible to avoid them. No sooner were they attracted by me than I saw one of the regular soldiers loading his gun, and a second before he raised it towards me I flew towards him, pushing the muzzle of his gun to one side. He would push me away from himself with one hand for a chance to shoot me, but I held close to him, away from the muzzle of the gun. This lasted six or eight seconds. Then breaking away from him, I ran around and behind the Turks who were looking on, without giving him a safe shot. This must have lasted six or eight seconds more. I could not say whether those looking on were amused, or a thought of benevolence came over them, but one of the crowd interfered, told the regular soldier to stop, and asked me if I was willing to become a Turk. I said, yes. Then he asked me if I was willing to become his boy. I said, yes. (I was ten or eleven years old). This good hearted Turk took me to his home for the night, where I was safe for ten hours. In the morning while I was helping do something around the house, a woman dressed in Turkish woman's clothes spoke to me, calling me by name. I recognized her by the voice that she was our neighbor who had disguised herself as a Turkish woman. In a few minutes she left me and started to go away. Avoiding being seen by any one I followed after her. Falling in with a large number of Turks and their fam-

ilies, but unrecognized by them, we succeeded in reaching a city after two or three days' journey.

What a wasting of life we saw, and what a destruction of property. Bulgaria was swept away by fire and sword. None of our male relatives were left alive, save one, and that was a year old child. Many of the women died of fear, plague and want. There were times when we had nothing to eat for days, nothing to sleep on but the bare field; and the suffering during the winter after the massacre is never to be forgotten by those who experienced it.

Out of the Devil's Hands.

After a few years of haphazard life, when I saw that it was not the whole world that had been wasted, I made up my mind to leave the place where home had been, and to strike out into the world. It is surprising how a man will think of his native home and be reluctant to leave it, even though it be a heap of ashes. But I was away.

I went as far as Constantinople, in Turkey. While strolling along the Bosphorus one day, I came in sight of a banner spangled with stars and banded with stripes, waving from the top of Robert College, upon the hill. It was the American flag. I thought it was the proudest flag I had ever seen, for it floated unmolested over Turkish soil. My blood leaped for joy when I caught a sight of it for the first time in my life, and realized it was the emblem of freedom Embarking upon a merchant steamer at Constantinople, I sailed through the Mediterranean, then North on the Atlantic and through the North Sea to Hamburg, Germany, working part of my way. From Hamburg I sailed over to London, and from London, at last, across the Atlantic. About two months and a half after leaving Bulgaria I found myself in New York. I knew no one there, no one knew me, and no one cared to know me. I never lay down to sleep under shelter so long as I stayed in the city. My nights I spent tramping around the harbor, or being

chased through the parks by the police. My frame was altogether too weak for heavy work after thirty-four days on rough sea, being sea sick a good part of the time, but when I was offered work in a brick yard in Plainfield, N.J., I gladly took it, and worked for three days, when I was taken sick. The man bought a ticket for me and hurried me off to New York.

Unhospitable New York, I left the same day for good. It missed absolutely nothing by my going away, for I did not have a cent in my pocket, so carried nothing out. I could not get my dinner when I left the city but expected to get it as soon as we reached New Haven, Conn. I arrived at New Haven after dark on the boat, and it soon became apparent that I was not going to have any supper either. My first night was spent in the jail. There was not a square inch of board to lie down on, only a stone floor, and four stone walls. I remained in the jail all night, waiting for the morning. And when the police let me out I thought that I was going to get something to eat for breakfast. But there was not any breakfast to be had that morning. I found occupation at a wood pile, splitting kindling wood for the city, and worked over four hours before I got any thing to eat. The longest four hours I ever worked.

It made no difference to me where I was. One place was as bad as another. Driven from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Canada, I turned westward to Chicago, hoping that the devil would stay back East, and not be following after me. But the very first place I entered in Chicago was a saloon on Fourth Ave. That saloon marked the turning point in my life. Four months passed, and a year and a half had elapsed since I left home. Life had become a pest to me, being out of work, without any friend, ragged and dirty, wearing the same suit in the winter that I wore in the summer, without an overcoat. Let not my friends think that I was in the habit of drinking while lingering in the saloon. I was in the saloon because there was no other place to go. I was sick and tired of the surroundings, but somehow I could not help myself out. Religion, I had left none as far as I could tell. The

night of the twenty-fifth of December was the night of my conversion. I went in to tell the saloon keeper that I could not pay my rent for the week, and asked him to wait till I could get something to do. Without any other warning than a curse. he aimed a quick blow at me, which struck square in the face. I hardly realized what happened.— A thought of my life, past and present, came before me in a moment of time. That blow brought me to my senses ; I came to myself. And while a thought of being without a home and without a friend was pressing upon me, a power, which I did not realize at the time, moved me to cry out: "Oh Devil, this is the last day I have served you." I started to go out, and just as I crossed the threshold on the side walk, I said: "Oh, God, from now on I will serve you, and I will go back to Bulgaria and preach." I wiped the blood off my face, found my hat in the street, and went to the Y. M. C. A. rooms at Farwell Hall, on Madison street. I sat by the middle window in the reading room, overlooking the street, and stayed there till about nine or half past, pondering, with no one near me, there being only a few men in the room, some of whom were reading, others asleep in their chairs. It would soon be ten o'clock, when the rooms would be closed, and I had to go out.— "Where am I going to stay tonight?" It was too cold to walk the streets all night without an overcoat. As I thought on and on, the tears began to run down my face.— But while crying a thought of great joy burst upon me ; a feeling such as would come if news reached me that father was yet alive and had come to Chicago and had found me. I realized the thought at once that God had taken hold of me. I began to laugh, my tears dried up. I forgot all about overcoats and cold streets, for I was born anew. I did not wait for ten o'clock to come, but went out the happiest fellow on the streets of Chicago that night. As far as I can trace the exact date of that night, it was the twenty-fourth, or the twenty-fifth of December, 1885. Three weeks after that, I was in Missouri, at Parkville, as a Park College student. I was informed of Park College, and helped enter there by Mr. Mishoff,

a Princeton student, who happened to be in Chicago at that time. He knew my address and providentially looked me up. When I got to the College, I had two dollars and a few cents in my pocket as a starter, but determined to stay till I should get through. The above amount and two more dollars was all the money I had to spend the first year, if not for a year and a half. At Park College, along with the rest of the students, I worked and studied for seven years; and by God's help when the Commencement of '93 came, I had my College diploma in my hand, and three dollars and thirty-five cents in my pockets.

Bulgaria.

It is ten years ago since I stood on the sidewalk in front of the saloon, but the words, "Return to Bulgaria and preach," have not died away; on the contrary, they have been the theme of my life while in college and in the seminary. The first thought, "Return to Bulgaria," was indefinite, but the ten years of study and meditation have made it more definite and clear. A glance at the map puts before our eyes Bulgaria and the six countries which surround her: Russia, Roumania, European Turkey, Servia, Greece, and Montenegro. If Bulgaria needs the Gospel, these six states need it more. Political and religious peace will never bless these countries until the Gospel has reached them all.

Bulgaria holds to the doctrines and traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church, which is the dominant religion in the seven states just named, numbering about one hundred million adherents in all. The Orthodox Church is ritualistic, more so than the Roman Catholic. It is not strongly organized as is the Papal. The power of the church does not center in one man, as in a pope. Each country is ruled ecclesiastically within itself. The Orthodox Church claims no political power as does the Roman.

In the fifteenth century, while Western Europe was being stirred by the Reformation from her sleep of the

"Dark Ages," while the people of Western Europe had time to think and speak of liberty and of religion, the people of Eastern Europe, on the contrary, were breathing their life against the invasions of the Turks. When the Turks crossed the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, into Europe, they advanced, fighting for every inch of ground, as far as Central Europe to the North, Italy to the West, and beyond Crimea to the East, conquering and keeping in subjection these lands for nearly five centuries. No advancement in civilization or religion was possible, and the Reformation never penetrated these countries. Let no one look upon these lands in disgrace, because it has been their misfortune to fall into the hands of the Turks. There is no disgrace to a man who falls dead in battle. On the contrary, honor is due to him by his comrades who happen to come out of the battle alive. Had not these nations checked the advancing Turks, though finally they fell a prey into their hands, the whole of Europe might have been swept by Mohammedanism, and today, instead of the Bible, Shakespeare, the Classics, the Arts and Sciences being taught at Oxford and Cambridge, the Koran might have been chanted yet.

But a new era of religion and liberty is dawning upon Bulgaria and the six neighboring states. Turkish rule has been driven out of these countries, only a small strip in Europe being left in their hands at present. Considered from the standpoint of religion and liberty, Bulgaria is the most conspicuous spot of land in all of Eastern Europe. In the last twenty years no other country on the face of the globe has witnessed such scenes of stirring events as Bulgaria. The political, the social and religious warfares, have awakened the people to thinking and to self-assertion. New forces and influences have fallen to the lot of Bulgaria, which have not only advanced her over and above her neighbors in political attainments, in social developments, in intellectual progress, and in religious awakening, but also fill us with the hope that the rise and salvation of Bulgaria shall serve for the rising and salvation of the neighboring countries.

Today, liberty of the press, liberty of speech, and liberty of religion, are public rights in Bulgaria. Every man in Bulgaria has the right to express his opinion on public, religious or social matters through the press or by speech. Every man is at liberty to profess whatever religion he chooses. In fact, the ruler of Bulgaria has not been bound down to a particular creed; for the first ruler, Alexander, was a Protestant, and the present ruler, Ferdinand, is a Roman Catholic. But Bulgaria is conspicuous for more than that. There are about six hundred thousand Turks living in Bulgaria now. No efforts, whatever, have at any time been put forth to christianize the Turks, and there is no missionary work of any kind being done for them anywhere in the world, for the very simple reason that the Turkish government will not permit any Turks to be converted, or anybody to try to convert a Turk. But with the 600,000 Turks in Bulgaria it is entirely a different matter. We are free to convert every Turk there, no government being in the way, but rather the support of the Bulgarian government. There are also many Russians and Roumanians and Servians and Montenegreans living in Bulgaria to whom we can not preach the gospel in their own country, for the same reason as in Turkey. The people have no liberty to think regarding their own religious welfare, and no missionaries are free to enter these countries around Bulgaria to preach the gospel. But in Bulgaria all can preach and believe freely.

Where could we look for a more inviting field to put our efforts for Christ and christian principles than Bulgaria? The existing conditions in Bulgaria are opportunities for us of rare possibilities. Not only is the evangelization of Bulgaria before us, but I believe that God has placed Bulgaria in the midst of these six countries of the same religion, of kindred language, the same traditions, for the purpose that Bulgaria might be the means of reviving the entire Greek, or the Orthodox Church. To realize our hopes for the reviving of the church, we are aiming to establish

A Gospel Printing Press in Bulgaria.

Only when we see the immensity of the work, and only when we undertake to evangelize these countries will we feel the need for establishing a Christian Press in Bulgaria to be used as a means of accomplishing the task. There is no power so potent in wielding and moulding public opinion and the religious sentiment of a people as the printing press. The press is the means of conveyance of a man's brain and heart power and of implanting his principles upon others. Ten men of able minds and consecrated hearts banded together and equipped with a printing press, will accomplish more toward the evangelization of Bulgaria than two hundred missionaries could.

We must have a Gospel Printing Press established in Bulgaria, if we do not, we let slip a golden opportunity in the history of christian missions and christian liberty. Bulgaria is the battle ground where the problem of religion in the Orthodox Church will be fought out. It is not an easy task to lay hold upon the press of a country, it may mean everything, but if Bulgaria is to be like a Gibraltar in Eastern Europe for the cause of religion and liberty. no effort, no cost, no prayer must be spared.

Begin with a Newspaper.

The work is to be commenced by starting a newspaper, not merely a Sunday School paper. For by a purely religious paper the work will never in the world be accomplished. The newspaper is the diary of a people, the written records of á nation's every day life in the week, not the records of a Sunday life only, but the records of six days of struggle for existence also. People can not live on religion only. But by dealing with the various problems of life which directly concern all classes of the people, this newspaper, which stands for christian principles in whatever sphere of life, would make its way into the homes of the people. The proper discussions of the great questions of church

and state, of religion, of social science, of commerce, of industry, of "bread and butter," will make the paper of popular interest. We begin so, but by no means do we propose to stop here, satisfied by *one* newspaper, and one printing establishment.

Bulgaria has several hundred students attending universities in foreign countries,—in Germany, Austria, France, Russia, England, Robert College in Constantinople, and not a few in America. There is a constant flow of these young men back to Bulgaria, returning from foreign lands. Each returning student carries back to Bulgaria his ideas which he has formed in Germany, France, Austria, Russia, England or America. But Bulgaria is the theatre where these different ideas clash; and the prevailing idea will largely determine the future Bulgaria. By having an institution of a christian press, not a few of these men will unite themselves for concerted and effective action.

A few years ago a member of the American Legation at Constantinople had a conference with a prominent Turkish official. The American was trying to convince the Turk that the work of the missionaries was not political, but moral and educational. While he was advancing his arguments, the Turk interrupted with the question, "Do you know the cause for the separation of Bulgaria from the Empire?" (Turkish Empire.) "I think that I understand some of the causes," replied the American. "Yes, you do, but the fundamental cause was that College on the hill. We understand that," said the Turk. By "that College on the hill" he referred to Robert College, the American institution on the Bosphorus.

Immediately after the Independence of Bulgaria, eighteen years ago, when Representatives were chosen by the people to attend the first National Assembly, for the purpose of choosing a ruler and to adopt the Constitution, something between the number of twelve and twenty of the Representatives elected by the people, were Robert College men, one out of every nine or ten. Prince Alexander, a Protestant, a hero in the war of Independence, and who afterwards proved to be the foremost defender of Free Bulgaria, was chosen

to be the ruler. One of his prime ministers was a Robert College graduate. The recently assassinated ex-premier of Bulgaria, "a typical child of his country to the backbone," whose purpose was the deliverance of Bulgaria from foreign interference and the maintenance of personal liberty, in the pursuit of which he knew neither friend or enemy, the staunchest and the most high-spirited supporters of his "Platform" consisted of Robert College men. The present premier, Mr. Stoeloff, who was chosen to take his place, and the minister of finance, in the same cabinet, are both graduates of the same College.

The oldest existing Bulgarian newspaper to-day, "*The Morning Star*," is a paper published by the American missionaries at Constantinople. Its editor, Mr. Byington, gave his own soul to this paper, and died over his desk, but a more prophetic name than "The morning Star," could not crown the sacred memories of those Americans who first in modern revival of religion carried the Gospel to Bulgaria, and kindled the spirit of liberty in her youth.

We need a steam printing press, which with all the necessary equipments will cost between two and three thousand dollars. With about two thousand dollars a good location for the press can be secured. The expenses of a man to preach and at the same time be of assistance to the press, will be about four hundred dollars a year. About three hundred dollars a year will pay the wages of a good printer in Bulgaria. The other expenses will be mainly for paper, ink, and for distribution.

Friend, I lay Bulgaria and this Gospel Printing Press at your door. If you are led to see anything in this cause, let the cause itself speak to you, what you can do, but I can not and I will not beg. For the evangelization of the world is not man's, but God's cause. You and I are co-workers. Can you buy the printing press, or can you contribute something toward it? We can use it with great effect to the end specified. You have as much to say as any one whether this work shall be started or not, for work of this kind involves

financial backing up. In order that the project might not be precipitated by lack of means, when we have once started it, we must be backed up financially by you. The way to do this is a promise on your part to contribute annually a definite amount of your choice, for a certain number of years. For instance, you desire to contribute $10, $25, $50, $100 a year to be applied for the carrying on of a particular branch of the work of the press, as you might designate. We would like that you should promise, by God's help, to do so each year, for eight or ten years, if so needed. I have no doubt but that in a few years the work of the press itself will become self-supporting. But for the present it must be started by you. We must begin the work on such a plan as this, because we will have to fight our way through. We not only must have the best papers, but we must have them so cheap that the poorest of the people might have them, money or no money.

The Bulgarian Evangelical Society, the object of whose existence is the evangelization of Bulgaria, is the proper organized body to own the printing press and to have its management in charge. The society is a body holding property according to the laws of the country. In the membership of the society we read the names of all the missionaries of the American Board who are working in Bulgaria, prominent among whom are Dr. I. H. House, Dr. H. K. Haskel, Dr. F. L. Kingsbury, Rev. J. F. Clark, Rev. George D. Marsh, Rev. Robert Thompson and others. The president of the society, the Rev. Marko N. Popoff, pastor of the church at Sophia, is a Hamilton College man, and also a graduate of Auburn Theological Seminary. All of the leading christians in Bulgaria are active members of that organization. It is safe and for the best to put the press and its management into the hands of the Bulgarian Evangelical Society, whose headquarters are in Sophia, Bulgaria, Europe.

I remain faithfully yours,

STEPHEN MOMCHILOFF,

Auburn Theological Seminary,

October 1st, 1896. Auburn, N. Y.

After November 1st, address correspondence to me at Sophia, Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian Evangelical Society.

Sophia, Bulgaria, February 25th, 1896.

This is to certify that the Bulgarian Evangelical Society, which is now in the twenty-first year of its existence, has full confidence in Mr. Stephen Monchiloff, a student of Auburn Theological Seminary, and authorizes him to collect funds for a printing press to be used by the same society for printing religious and moral literature, and of which the society has a great need. Mr. Momchiloff is authorized, in addition to the printing press, to collect funds for its maintenance and for a home for the society, which is one of its most urgent needs. This society has its headquarters in Sophia, the capital of Bulgaria, where it has for years maintained a Bible depot. By securing a home of its own a heavy rent will be saved for other evangelical purposes. The proposed building will contain, beside the Bible depot, a reading room and a hall for religious services and other morally uplifting entertainments for young and old.

A most suitable site in the heart of the city has already been secured and paid for. Also about one thousand dollars for the building itself has been collected. About four thousand dollars more will enable us to erect a substantial building which will be a means for doing a great good.

Therefore, we again commend Mr. Momchiloff to the liberality of all who want to help in the Gospel enlightenment of the Bulgarians and the rest of the Balkan nations.

The Bulgarian Evangelical Society is undenominational.

Sealed and signed by

President, M. N. Popoff,
Secretary, J. S. Popoff.

Contributions for the "Press" should be sent in the form of drafts on London, to Rev. Marko N. Popoff, of the Bulgarian Evangelical Society, Sophia, Bulgaria.